CZECHOSLOVAKIA: THE PHONY OCCUPATION

Normalization in the Wake of the 1968 Intervention

By Fred Eidlin

Introduction

Looking back at what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968, it has long seemed clear to most observers what happened and why. The post-January movement of reform and renewal had posed a serious threat to Soviet communist orthodoxy, and thus had to be stopped. For eight months, the Soviets tried various means to bring the Czechoslovak leadership to act decisively to bring the situation under control. When this didn't work they launched a military intervention which, despite certain undesirable consequences, brought about a speedy realization of Soviet aims. Within a few years, Czechoslovak politics had been thoroughly "normalized," i. e., restored to close conformity with Soviet communist orthodoxy. Virtually all resistance and opposition had been neutralized. Almost all aspects of the Czechoslovak reform movement disturbing Czechoslovakia's allies had been reversed. All leaders who symbolized the "Prague Spring" had recanted or been replaced by obedient executors of the Soviet policy. All declarations and the resolutions proclaiming the intervention to be illegal and unnecessary had been declared nul and void. Such results make it hard to deny the success of Soviet policy. The Soviets had made clear what they didn't like during the "Prague Spring" and, since all this changed after the intervention, it looks like a straightforward case of the successful achievement of aims.

However, present reality and the apparent inevitability of what actually happened make Soviet policy look far more prescient, rational, coherent, successful and guided by long-range strategy than it actually was. What actually happened naturally possesses a concreteness and plausibility that other possible outcomes or variations along the causal chain cannot have had. This makes it easy to overlook the substantial body of evidence suggesting confusion, disunity, indecisiveness and especially ambivalence among Soviet decision makers about how to deal with Czechoslovakia. It also makes it easy to forget, or at least underestimate, the significance of the initial failure of the intervention to achieve its aims, as well as the stumbling, ad hoc nature of Soviet policy in Czechoslovakia during the months following the intervention. Seen through the lens of a "normalized" Czechoslovakia, however, the outcome appears as a quick realization of predetermined Soviet policy aims.

Few people nowadays even remember that the invasion of August 21st, 1968, failed to achieve its immediate aims[1]. No puppet government emerged and virtually the

[1] Eidlin, Fred: The Initial Political Failure of the Warsaw Pact Intervention in Czechoslovakia of 21 August 1968. East Central Europe 5 (1978) 245–266.

entire population of Czechoslovakia and its ruling institutions spontaneously mobilized into a coordinated, non-violent resistance movement, which the uninvited foreign troops were unable to bring under control, despite the overwhelming force at their disposal. After two days of unsuccessful *ad hoc* attempts to establish a new party and governmental authority, the very leaders who had been arrested on August 21st were returned to power. It is also usually forgotten how long and arduous the process was by which the reform movement was reversed. In fact, for at least the first seven months, apart from being a crushing blow to national pride and morale, occupation had far less impact than had been generally anticipated. Not only did the reformist leadership remain in power, virtually intact, but in many ways the reform movement continued almost as if there had been no military intervention. The Soviets could not seem to break the influence of the reformists and bring about the kind of "normalization" of the situation they apparently desired.

If Soviet policy had aimed simply at crushing the reform movement, this could easily have been accomplished by means of a conventional occupation regime. Obviously, however, this was not what Soviet policy makers had in mind. The "Prague Spring" and the various attempts to contain it can be fruitfully seen as but one episode in a continuing crisis of the Soviet power system in Eastern Europe. The leaderships of the East European Communist states have all been facing different variations of the same deep and persistent dilemma since the death of Stalin. Although the regime they inherited from Stalin was fundamentally unstable, some of the very features contributing to this instability belong to the cement that holds together both the Soviet alliance system and the Soviet-type regime itself. Thus, although it has long been clear to the ruling elites of these states that systemic reform is absolutely necessary to overcome the endemic instability of this type of regime, such systemic reform has also been seen as threatening the very foundations of their power and of the Soviet alliance system in Europe[2].

It is thus important to recognize and understand the profound ambivalence of the Soviet Union and its orthodox allies concerning the Czechoslovak reform movement[3]. Without a doubt, this movement represented a serious threat to them. Nevertheless, the leaderships of Czechoslovakia's allies were also well aware that this very same movement responded to a profound crisis of legitimacy threatening the very foundations of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

Certainly, by the time of the 1968 intervention, Soviet aims must be seen as including the promotion of stable and viable regimes which would be faithful and reliable allies. The Czechoslovak reform movement held out real hope that the severe social, economic and political problems endangering the stability of the regime might at last

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[2] Hutchings, Robert L.: Soviet-East European Relations: Consolidation and Conflict. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1987, 18–20.

[3] In addition to my book The Logic of "Normalization": The Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia of 21 August and the Czechoslovak Response. Columbia University Press and East European Monographs, New York/Boulder 1980 (especially chapter 4), see also my Misperception, Ambivalence, and Indecision in Soviet Policy-making: The Case of the 1968 Invasion of Czechoslovakia. In: Conflict 5 (1984) No. 2, 89–117.

be solved, and thus vital interests of the Soviet Union protected. It was thus exceedingly difficult for the Soviet leadership to make up its collective mind whether to regard the Czechoslovak reformist leadership and the entire movement of reform and renewal as problem or solution. This helps explain the erratic oscillations in Soviet policy during the "Prague Spring" between brutality and intransigence on the one hand and understanding and conciliation on the other hand. Evidence of a lack of clarity, unity, and decisiveness on the part of the Soviet Union persisted not only throughout the "Prague Spring", but also during the months immediately following the invasion[4].

The tragedy of what happened in 1968 is that once an intervention had been launched as an act of "friendship and brotherly assistance", it simply could not be allowed to remain on record as a crime, a failure and a mistake. Once carried out, it had to made to appear motivated by high principles, necessary, and successful. For it not to appear in this light in the longterm run would have posed far greater dangers to the stability of the Soviet power system than anything that had been going on during the "Prague Spring". Moreover, it is precisely because the "normalization" process in Czechoslovakia represented such a profound and irrational denial of reform tendencies ripening in all the East European Communist states, including the Soviet Union, that the "Prague Spring" and its repression have remained so exceedingly sensitive in these countries, even at this writing in mid-1988, when all kinds of political tabus have fallen in the atmosphere of *Glasnost*.

This article reexamines the widely forgotten initial stages of "normalization," during which Soviet policy was in considerable disarray in trying to come to grips with these multiple dilemmas in the chaotic, emotionally-charged state of affairs in post-invasion Czechoslovakia.

The Incongruity of the Occupation During Alexander Dubček's Tenure as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz)

Several aspects of the political situation in Czechoslovakia seemed strikingly incongruous in light of the fact that the country had been invaded and remained occupied. For example:

Little Change in the Reformist Leadership: The Czechoslovak leadership remained essentially the same as it had been before intervention, despite the fact that Dubček and several other reformists at the top of the leadership had been arrested and blamed for the state of affairs that had allegedly made intervention necessary[5]. During Dubček's tenure as First Secretary only a small number of officials were removed from their functions and, in most cases, there was some obvious reason for Soviet

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[4] See, e. g. Löwenthal, Richard: The Sparrow in the Cage. In: Encounter (1969) Nr. 1, 87.

[5] See, for example Defence of Socialism: The Highest International Duty. Pravda (Moscow) 22 August 1968. Complete text in English in Remington, Robin A. (ed.): Winter in Prague. Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis. M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, MA 1969.

dissatisfaction with these individuals apart from their enthusiastic advocacy of reformist ideas. Indeed, during this period the pattern emerged that whenever a noted reformist was removed from an important position not only was he replaced by someone else with acceptable reformist credentials, but the replacement of a noted pro-Soviet conservative would be announced at the same time. It was only after Dubček's replacement as First Secretary that massive and systematic purges began, which eventually reached down to the lowest levels of the Communist Party and the bureaucracies of the state and mass organizations.

Embarrassing Facts for the Soviets: The Warsaw Pact intervention had been condemned in official resolutions of Czechoslovak Communist Party and state bodies and mass organizations at all levels, from the Presidium of the Party's Central Committee to the government, National Assembly, National Front on down. These condemnations remained on the record. During Dubček's tenure as First Secretary, the intervention was neither legalized nor justified. Furthermore, in announcing the entry of allied troops into Czechoslovakia, the Soviets had claimed to be responding to an appeal for assistance from "leading Czechoslovak Party and state representatives." Yet not a single one of these was named or identified himself for years after intervention. This state of affairs must have been exceedingly embarrassing to the Soviets, but it was not until after Dubček's replacement that a gradual process began, which eventually led to retroactive, official legalization and justification of the intervention and repeal of all condemnations of it.

Under Dubček not only did the intervention remain on record as illegal and unjustified, but the Party's official analysis of the pre-invasion political situation came nowhere near to suggesting that intervention had been necessary. To be sure, the leadership admitted that it had made mistakes, that there had indeed been some disturbing aspects of the pre-invasion situation, and that it had underestimated the concern of its allies. On balance, however, post-January, pre-invasion developments continued to be represented as far more positive than negative, certainly well under the Party's control and (by clear implication) in no way requiring foreign intervention[6].

Media Retain Reformist Character: It is well known that the uncensored Czechoslovak mass media represented a major source of alarm for the Soviets. And, in the secret protocol signed in Moscow on August 26th, the Czechoslovak leadership agreed to take steps to rectify the situation. In the words of the Moscow Protocol, "a series of priority measures" were to be implemented "to control the media so that they may fully serve the cause of socialism, and to put an end to the anti-socialist feeling expressed by the radio, the television and certain organizations which have taken up definite anti-socialist positions."

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[6] See, e. g. Dubček's addresses to the November 1968 and January 1969 plena of the Central Committee of the CPCz: Projev A. Dubčeka. In: Rudé právo 15 November 1968; 18 January 1968. – Hlavní úkoly strany v nejbližším období. Resoluce listopadového pléna. In: Rudé právo 19 November 1968. – See also Eidlin, Fred: The November Plenum. Radio Free Europe Research, Czechoslovakia 1968, No. 50.

> ... Party and state organs will watch over the cleansing process of the press, radio and television, by means of new laws and ordinances. In view of the abnormal situation, the execution of these tasks will require certain temporary measures so that the government may energetically repress all anti-socialist intrigue, whether individual or collective. An overhaul of senior personnel in the press, radio and television will be inevitable[7].

In fact, restrictions on the mass media were announced and actually implemented and some senior personnel were relieved of their functions. Under Dubček, guidelines were given to the mass media informing them of what they could not write or broadcast. Offending publications were given penalties ranging from fines to suspension and even termination. But the restrictions imposed were not severe, and the application of penalties was restrained. No thorough-going purges of the mass media were carried out, and they thus remained preponderantly staffed by reform-minded personnel. Despite the restrictions imposed on them, the media remained lively and critical. It was only after Dubček's political demise that preliminary censorship was reinstituted and that the mass media were thoroughly purged and placed in the hands of hardline orthodox ideologues.

Status of the Party Congresses: It has been widely speculated that a major reason why the intervention took place when it did was to prevent the Extraordinary 14th Congress of the CPCz from beginning as scheduled on September 9th. The Soviet leadership had opposed the holding of the Congress from the very outset, and was concerned about preparations for it, and especially about its likely results[8]. Since the Congress was expected to eliminate from the CPCz leadership those most in sympathy with Soviet positions[9], the Soviets faced a choice of intervening before the Congress, or accepting the prospect of a complete and legitimate take-over of the CPCz by reformist elements[10].

One of the most explicit provisions of the Moscow Protocol was a declaration of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPCz that the "so-called Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party, meeting on 22nd August ... was in breach of Party statutes ... and is ... invalid," and that an extraordinary congress would be summoned only "after the situation in the Party and the country had been normalized"[11]. To be

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[7] Tigrid, Pavel: Czechoslovakia: A Post Mortem II. Survey (1970) 74/76.

[8] Littell, Robert (ed.): The Czech Black Book. Prepared by the Institute of History of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Praeger, New York 1969, 125–130.

[9] Ostrý, Antonín: Československý problém. Index, Cologne 1972, 170.

[10] According to Josef Smrkovský, one of the leading reformists in the Czechoslovak leadership in 1968 and 1969, not only was the 14th Congress the determining factor for the date of the invasion, but it was the principal and decisive reason for the decision to resort to military intervention. Smrkovský, Josef: Významné svědectví. (Josef Smrkovský o roce 1968). In: Listy (1975) No. 2. Or, as Ostrý puts it, "the approaching 14th Congress gave no hopes for the point of view the USSR was forcing upon us ... (From this the point of view) the intervention appears a rescue which came long after the eleventh hour." In: Ostrý 1972, 16, 156, 170.

[11] For an analysis of how the Congress assembled under the conditions of the occupation and how the Congress influenced the political situation after the invasion see Eidlin 1980, 226–239.

sure, the congress was not recognized as valid, but even those elected at the Congress to positions of leadership had regarded its results as provisional. It is significant that the leadership elected at the Congress dissolved itself only after negotiations with Dubček concerning concrete conditions under which the Moscow Protocol would be acceptable. In addition to cooptation to the CPCz Central Committee of an adequate number of members of the Central Committee elected at the "invalid" Congress, those members of the Presidium who had compromised themselves by collaborating with the occupation would have to be removed from that body. Any necessary changes in the government and mass media would have to be handled in such a way that those replaced would be replaced by less well known, but no less reliable adherents of reform. The 14th Congress would have to be held promptly, and negotiations regarding the withdrawal of foreign troops would have to begin without delay. Not only were these conditions accepted by Dubček in essence but, as the record shows, they were, for the most part, adhered to until after the change of leadership in April, 1969[12]. The delegates who participated in the "invalid" Congress – so much anathema to the Soviets – were even thanked by Dubček at the Central Committee Plenum of 31 August 1968 for having greatly contributed to the authority of the Party through their actions[13].

Furthermore, the validity of the Extraordinary Congress of the Communist Party of Slovakia which, like its Czechoslovak counterpart, had opened under clandestine conditions: was not challenged. And, throughout the September 1968 to April 1969 period, the Party leadership seemed firmly committed to convoking a constituent congress of the Communist Party in the Czech lands as soon as possible to serve as a counterpart to the Slovak Party, and to convene the Extraordinary Czechoslovak Party Congress without too much delay. Since the delegates to both of these congresses would have been the same as those who had assembled at the invalidated Congress on August 22nd, the outlook for reform might have seemed encouraging[14]. Although it is true that in the following months the Soviets would not give the go ahead for either of these Congresses, under Dubček the aim of holding them in the near future was never abandoned.

Programmatic Reform: Examining the speeches of the top Czechoslovak leadership and the programmatic statements of the country's ruling bodies in the months following the invasion, one gains the impression that the leadership had not really abandoned any of the fundamental principles of its reform program. To be sure, all programmatic statements of the post-invasion period take notice that the complex realities of the post-invasion situation necessitated a slower pace of reform. A more alarmed attitude toward "anti-socialist" tendencies in society is apparent, and in general, greater

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[12] Hejzlar, Zdeněk: Reform-Kommunismus. Zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Partei der Tschechoslowakei. Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Cologne/Frankfurt 1976, 290–291. – Smrkovský 1975, 22–23.

[13] Útvar svodné informace plánu a řízení. O zasedání ústředního výboru KSČ dne 31. srpna 1968. Pro členy a aktiv KV a OV KSČ a KSS vydal Útvar svodné informace plánu a řízení ÚV KSČ v září 1968, 13 (for internal Party information).

[14] Rok šedesátý osmý v usneseních a dokumentech ÚV KSČ (RSO). Prague 1969, 311.

effort is made to calm Soviet[15] fears. Nevertheless, during this period the Party does not, as yet, appear to have abandoned any of its fundamental reform principles.

Whether or not these impressions are correct depends on two sets of questions: First of all, what were the fundamental principles of reform of the CPCz, and, second, to which of these principles were the Soviets unequivocally opposed? Since I do not believe a clear answer can be given to either of these questions, it is exceedingly difficult to determine the extent to which the programmatic reform that survived at least Dubček's period of leadership was really incongruous.

Throughout Dubček's tenure (and even after), the Party leadership remained unequivocally committed to their Party's "post-January" policies. The problem for our analysis lies in discovering any concrete or fixed meaning for this notion, since it came to mean so many different things to so many different people throughout 1968 and 1969. As Antonín Kurina wrote in March 1969: "January is endorsed by progressives, conservatives and reactionaries, rightists and leftists, people of the centre and I do not know what else they call themselves or how we christen them. And who would dare speak differently in public? He would be booed and thrown out."[16]

Most analysts have taken the Action Program adopted at the April 1968 Plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee[17] as a standard against which to measure the status of programmatic reform in Czechoslovakia after the invasion. It is not, however, a particularly satisfactory standard.

The *Action Program* was drafted and accepted by the Party early in 1968 as a kind of first draft of a reform program. It had not been subjected to the test of experience. At the time, the Party leadership could have had no way of foreseeing how the situation might develop. As the Resolution of the November Plenum of the Central Committee put it:

> The Party's Action Program, following the conclusions of the April Plenum became the first integrated step toward formation of the Party's further course of action. The Action Program did not, and understandably could not, give an immediate answer to all questions and to a number of questions it could not even give complete and absolutely precise answers[18].

It was therefore regarded only as basic Party policy for the immediate future. As an open program it would be tried out theoretically and in practice, corrected where necessary and developed further in accordance with the decisions of the CPCz CC, in such a way that at a regular congress of the Party an integrated Party policy could be approved, which would correspond to the stage already reached in the general progress of socialism in the ČSSR.

Admittedly this resolution was composed under the shadow of foreign troops,

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[15] Here and in many places throughout this paper, "Soviets" should be understood as including those leaders and decision makers in the other states participating in the invasion who shared Soviet concerns.

[16] Kurina, Antonín in: Smena 14 March 1969.

[17] Akční program komunistické strany Československa přijatý na plenárním zasedání ÚV KSČ dne 5. dubna 1968. Svoboda, Prague 1968.

[18] Hlavní úkoly (1968). – For an inquiry into the extent to which the November Plenum represented compromise of the Party's post-January policies see Eidlin 1968, 50.

but it does in fact articulate a point of view implicit in Party policy even before the intervention.

It should be recognized that, despite the great hopes awakened by the Action Program, the Party leadership would probably have had to qualify, modify and even retreat from aspects of it even had there been no intervention. One of the primary objectives of the Action Program at the time it was put forward was to attract the widest possible support for a severely discredited Party. It sought to establish and maintain the "leading role of the Party" by presenting an attractive political program, thus winning freely-given support. The party offered this program in an atmosphere of impatient desire for reform, in which the belief was widespread that the Soviet Union had changed enough since its 1956 intervention in Hungary that it would not block such reform by force. To treat the Action Program as a fixed map of CPCz policies would be somewhat analogous to taking literally speeches from the throne in British Commonwealth countries or the platforms of U.S. political parties. It would be to ignore the fundamentally open, political character of the Action Program.

A delegation of the Czechoslovak leadership headed by Dubček was informed on October 4th that the Action Program was "actually an incorrect programmatic document"[19]. Nevertheless, the Party leadership did not really abandon it. To be sure, the Action Program was not mentioned as frequently, nor was it referred to as representing the current framework of Party policy. But none of its principles were explicitly repudiated and it continued to serve as a point of reference.

Moreover, it is not clear that the Soviets were unequivocally opposed to the Action Program. Nor is it clear just which concrete aspects they opposed and how seriously. To be sure, as has been widely noted in the literature, several aspects of the Action Program obviously ran against the grain of orthodox Soviet-type Communist principles. It is also true that most of the important programmatic reforms of the Action program were subsequently abandoned, reversed, or drained of substance. Yet, the relevant evidence suggests that the Soviet leadership was fundamentally ambivalent and undecided about the Action Program and seriously divided as to which aspects (if any) of it should give cause for alarm.

As H. G. Skilling points out, the Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, on April 30th in its first full article dealing with Czechoslovakia gave a positive appraisal of the Action Program[20]. Smrkovský states that in discussions held between Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders on May 4th the Soviets had expressed some reservations about the Action Program, but the sense of these reservations was that the Czechoslovak leadership was allegedly insufficiently clear about what it wanted[21]. Moreover, as Zdeněk Hejzlar points out[22], despite their undeniable uneasiness about the Czecho-

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[19] Mlynář, Zdeněk: Nachtfrost: Erfahrungen auf dem Weg vom realen zum menschlichen Sozialismus. Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Cologne/Frankfurt 1978.

[20] Skilling, H. Gordon: Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1976, 250.

[21] Smrkovský 1975, 8.

[22] Hejzlar 1976, 229.

slovak reform movement, until after the invasion the Soviet leadership never *publicly* criticized the Action Program, the composition of the Czechoslovak leadership or the decisions of the Communist Party's Central Committee and its Presidium. Finally, it must be noted that in most, if not all, the areas of reform addressed by the Action Program, similar reforms could be found in other Warsaw Pact states which represented at least as radical departures from orthodox Soviet political norms.

The Czechoslovak response to the August intervention hardened Soviet attitudes toward the Czechoslovak reform program. The Soviets had expected the leaders, institutions and population of Czechoslovakia to acquiesce in the occupation of their country[23]. The dramatic failure of these expectations[24] must have drawn Soviet attention to the obvious relationships between many of the principles enshrined in the Action Program and the Czechoslovak response to the intervention. It does not follow from this, however, that the Soviets had a clear picture of how much of the Action Program would be allowed, let alone that it would have to be rolled back as far as it eventually was. Primary Soviet concern was clearly with more fundamental matters than which specific reforms would be allowed. These will be dealt with below.

It should be useful to note some of the areas of programmatic reform in which progress surprisingly continued to be made despite the occupation[25]. For example, plans for federalization of Czechoslovakia were implemented, despite the fact that this initiative was the result of nationalist pressures from the Slovaks. Rehabilitation of individuals unjustly persecuted in the early years of the Communist regime also continued and was given wide publicity. New institutional arrangements were established providing for a less dictatorial relationship between the Community Party and the other social and political organizations comprising the National Front. To be sure, there was a slowing down of some reforms and postponement (which in some cases turned out eventually to mean abandonment) of others. And yet, in assessing the overall situation, it should be remembered not only that Czechoslovakia was occupied, but that the pre-invasion ideals of the reformists had been very high and not guaranteeing of realization even had there been no invasion.

Survival of Reform throughout Society: The post- January 1968 reform movement in Czechoslovakia began with the Communist Party and the Party remained in the forefront of the movement up to the time of the intervention. However, no adequate characterization of the reform movement could fail to take account of what was going on outside the orchestration and direction of the Party leadership. The social and political developments usually seen as belonging to the reform movement developed a momentum of their own. In many cases specific Party and government measures contributed to, shaped and guided developments. For example, machinery had to be set in motion to prepare the legislation bringing about federalization, economic

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[23] Hejzlar, citing Oldřich Černík as his authority, reports that the Soviets expected over 50 % of the population to welcome the intervention enthusiastically. Hejzlar 1976, 248 ff.

[24] See, e. g. Eidlin 1978 and Eidlin 1980.

[25] For more detailed discussion see Kusin, Vladimir V.: From Dubček to Charter 77: A Study of "Normalization" in Czechoslovakia 1968–1978. Q Press, Edinburgh 1978.

reforms, and rehabilitation of the unjustly persecuted. Yet, to a significant extent, the Party and government were responding to initiatives from outside and were influenced, advised, pressured, and carried along by debates and developments going on either outside the Party and government or within the Party and government but outside the immediate control and supervision of the top leadership.

In countless other cases developments belonging to the 1968 reform movement were not the results of official initiatives. They simply emerged in the post- January political atmosphere. Developments in the mass media provide an excellent illustration. The censors, who had closely controlled the flow of information under the old regime, simply stopped exercising their functions. Journalists and editors then began to print and broadcast whatever information they considered appropriate. New organizations sprang up throughout Czechoslovak society and old organizations, previously under strict Communist Party supervision began to rejuvenate and reorganize themselves.

It would be a vast undertaking to describe all the significant areas in which reform was taking place, since what is at issue here is a society-wide transformation. Even Skilling's monumental 900-page work barely scratches the surface of what was happening throughout Czechoslovak society. All this is important to keep in mind, since most appearances that the intervention had changed little fall into this category. As with programmatic reform, it is difficult to determine clearly just which aspects or components of this many-faceted process of social transformation the Soviets opposed unequivocally. Here, to, Soviet Union policy was ambivalent, undecided and largely uninformed about the situation.

To effect changes in this category, it was not enough for the Party leadership to make changes in Party policy. Individuals throughout society had to be persuaded or coerced to go along with and help to implement such changes, or they had to be replaced by other individuals. It was here, as we will see, that the crux of the problem lay for the Soviets as well as for the Czechoslovak leadership.

Soviet Aims and Objectives and the Constraints on their Realization

I am well aware that the foregoing sketches of apparent incongruities in the post-invasion political situation in Czechoslovakia, present a skewed, incomplete picture of what was happening. In focusing on those aspects of the situation which surprisingly seemed unchanged despite the invasion, I have largely neglected the important political changes taking place during Dubček's final months as leader of the CPCz, the relentless grinding down of the political foundations of the reform movement and the concomitant reconstruction of a political base for the faithful supporters of Soviet policy in Czechoslovakia. This is the story that is usually told, the story of how the winners won and how and why they had been bound from the outset to win[26].

Despite the importance (and in a sense primacy) of this other story, there is considerable value in examining the constraints on Soviet policy in post-invasion Czecho-

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[26] See, e. g. Tigrid, Pavel: La chute irrésistible d'Alexandre Dubček. Calmann-Levy, Paris 1969. – Kusin 1978, 7–65. – Skilling 1976, 813–823.

slovakia. This may help us to understand better the character of Soviet policy in Eastern Europe more generally and the kinds of constraints to which it is subject. Furthermore, exploration of the resilience of reformism under the pressure of "normalization" may yield insight into what lies beneath the surface of Czechoslovak politics up to the present day and, more generally, into the forces driving the process of restructuring in all the European Communist states.

The Soviet Union was clearly capable of destroying Czechoslovakia or of bringing about the changes it desired by imposing martial law or any one of a number of conceivable policies involving force. Some analysts have suggested that the Soviets could not afford to employ such drastic measures because of the foreign policy consequences they would have entailed[27]. Yet, I believe it is a mistake to identify foreign policy consequences as the as the principal set of constraints on Soviet policy. As suggested above, the Soviets expected their forces to be welcomed enthusiastically. From the Soviet point of view, the entry of allied troops onto Czechoslovak territory was not a foreign invasion or occupation, but simply a show of force to provide back-up for political forces sympathetic to the Soviet point of view to organize and do what they had long considered necessary but had not been able to do because of the dependency of the post-January regime upon popular support. The intervention was to serve a function analogous to U.S. President Eisenhower's dispatching troops to Little Rock and President Kennedy's dispatching troops to Birmingham. In both these cases, as was also clearly intended in the Czechoslovak case, the purpose of military force was to lend support, both symbolic and operational, to those forces representing the "true interests of society". To be sure, since the legitimate authorities of the Czechoslovak Republic had not consented to the entry of their allies' troops and, after it took place, had characterized it as "a denial of the basic norms of international law"[28], this action was clearly an illegal foreign invasion. But these facts, as well as the apparently unanimous Czechoslovak rejection of the intervention were, from the Soviet point of view, accidental outcomes which were not expected and should not have been allowed by the Czechoslovak leadership to happen[29].

The record of Soviet behavior from the early hours of the intervention and throughout the months and years that followed, shows a stubborn, singleminded determination on the part of the Soviet leadership to facilitate the coalescence of a Czechoslovak leadership group which could be trusted but which, at the same time, would be capable of ruling by political and administrative means.

All evidence points to great Soviet reluctance to actually apply force. No doubt, if violent resistance had broken out, it would have been put down by force. If the situation in Czechoslovakia had appeared heading for a complete and irrevocable Soviet fiasco, some form of Soviet military rule might have been temporarily established. But even at the height of the non-violent popular resistance that emerged in response to the invasion, the occupation troops showed great restraint, even when provoked. The troops went to great lengths to show friendship toward the population,

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[27] See Hejzlar 1976, 280.
[28] See Littell 1969, 50.
[29] See Eidlin 1978 and Eidlin 1980.

even though their offers of friendship were almost universally spurned[30]. Moreover, in the months that followed Soviet troops and secret police forces took no part at all in the suppression of protests, demonstrations, or other social and political manifestations known to be disturbing to the Soviet leadership.

Neither is there any indication whatsoever that the Soviets, at any time attempted, intended or had any interest in taking control of any of the machinery of the Czechoslovak Communist Party or government, to exercise any of their functions, or even to install a Czechoslovak puppet leadership. All Soviet efforts were aimed at facilitating the emergence of a Czechoslovak leadership coalition that would take Soviet concerns more seriously[31].

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[30] For an analysis of the character of the occupation see Eidlin 1980, 51–57.

[31] Dubček, Alexander: Proslov A. Dubčeka na zářiovém plénu ÚV KSČ. In: Svědectví 10 (1970) 267–280. – For example, on the night of the invasion, the Soviets apparently expected the entry of their troops alone to reinforce the political influence of their sympathizers within the Presidium of the CPCz Central Committee enough to enable them to take control of that body (which was in session at the time) by purely political means. No Soviet military of KGB forces were sent to the Presidium to provide backup for supporters of the occupation, and the meeting went on for almost three hours, finally approving the text of a proclamation "to all the people of Czechoslovakia" condemning the intervention.

Neither were any political directives given to the leaders of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia visited the President of the Republic shortly after the beginning of the invasion, and the President then went to the meeting of the CPCz Presidium. But the information he gave about his talk with the Ambassador does *not* suggest that Moscow had prepared any immediate political solution for the situation in the country (Hejzlar 1976, 254; Eidlin 1978, 253–254). The Presidium adjourned with the understandig that members would return to their offices or to the party hotel and wait to be contacted by a representative of the "allied" (i. e. occupation) forces, so that the Presidium could reassemble and decide on a further course of action (Dubček 1970, 277; Smrkovský 1975, 16; Gueyt, Remi: La mutation tchècoslovaque: analysée par un temoin 1968–1969. Paris 1969, 288). Thus, as Remi Gueyt writes, given the available evidence:

> The only possibility left as confounding as this may be, is that the Soviets relied passively on the good will of organs and of people whom they had done nothing to prepare or organize. It appears that the Soviets had not included anyone in their game in advance, with the exception of Czechoslovaks already in Moscow (Gueyt 1969, 289).

A few Czechoslovak leaders sympathetic to the Soviet cause (who were quickly labelled as "collaborators") began early in the morning of August 21st to assist Soviet representatives in attempts to constitute a new political authority. Nevertheless, these "collaborators" did not attempt to impose themselves as the new rulers of the country, threatening the wrath of the occupation forces if they were not accepted. Nor did the Soviets attempt to impose a particular group of individuals as rulers. Soviet policy consistently strove to work within existing legitimate Czechoslovak institutions.

The first attempt to constitute a new centre of political authority took place at a meeting of about one third of the membership of the CPCz Central Committee, in the party's hotel Praha, almost a full day after the occupation had begun. And yet, although the "collaborators", as well as armed members of the occupation forces were present at this meeting, its outcome was ambiguous. On the one hand, the resolution adopted at this meeting seems to accept the fact of the occupation, which it characterizes as "the harsh reality in which we have found ourselves and which cannot be changed at once". On the other hand, this meeting did not in any way welcome the intervention. Indeed, it expressed full support for the position

To be sure, the Soviets sought persistently to split the Czechoslovak leadership. In the months following the Moscow negotiations, various measures were taken to discover and exploit divisions within the Czechoslovak leadership, to weaken the political positions of individuals they opposed and strengthen the positions of those they trusted and favored. The Soviets also continued to press the Czechoslovak leadership for further concessions and greater compliance with Soviet desires. Yet all changes were brought about by *political means*, and relevant decisions and actions were take by the Czechoslovak leadership.

A fundamental premise of Soviet policy was, therefore, to achieve its aims and objectives through legitimate Czechoslovak authorities and institutions. This premise imposed important constraints on Soviet policy, since if key reformists had resigned in protest, the tenuous political framework achieved through the Moscow negotiations might well have collapsed.

Some analysts who have studied the post-intervention situation see Dubček and his associates as terribly naive to have thought that they could remain in power and preserve even a modified version of the Party's reform program. Mlynář writes that he recognized his own hopes and expectations to be illusory barely a month after the negotiations in Moscow[32]. Yet most of the principal members of the reform leadership, although naturally differing to some extent in their assessment of what was realizable seemed to have genuinely believed in the possibility of their success[33]. These

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taken by the CPCz Presidium which had characterized the intervention as "contrary to the fundamental principles of relations between socialist states and a denial of the basic norms of international law". If this rump Central Committee meeting is considered as an attempt at establishing some sort of collaborationist authority, it should be noted that it came late, was sharply divided in its debates and unsuccessful in establishing such an authority (Eidlin 1978, 256–257).

An explicit attempt to constitute a temporary combined Party and Government authority which took place in the Soviet Embassy on August 22nd, the second day of the occupation, has been described in some detail by Zdeněk Mlynář, who actually participated in these discussion (Mlynář 1978, 241–253). The Soviet Ambassador left the group of Czechoslovak officials mostly comprised of those members of the CPCz Presidium who had not been arrested to work out these matters by themselves. Some members of the group were willing to accept positions in the "revolutionary 'workers and peasants' government" under discussion, but others had reservations. In any case, there was agreement that Dubček and the other members of the leadership (whose whereabouts and status were unclear) would have to take part in any definitive arrangements and when Mlynář proposed that the discussions be moved to Prague Castle and include the President of the Republic, no one, including the Soviet Ambassador, was opposed (Mlynář 1978, 251).

President Svoboda rejected the proposal that had been discussed at the Soviet Embassy and demanded face to face negotiations with the top Soviet leadership in Moscow. The Soviets accepted. In Moscow, Svoboda demanded the inclusion of those leaders who had been interned on the day of the invasion.

By this point, the Soviet leadership had recognized that an alternative Czechoslovak leadership was not politically possible and, by August 25th at the latest, had accepted the necessity of allowing the same leadership that had existed before the invasion to return to power (Mlynář 1978, 271).

[32] Mlynář 1978, 314.

[33] See, e.g. Mlynář 1978, 316–321. – Smrkovský 1975, 23–25. – Smrkovský, Josef: Das Smrkovský Interview der italienischen Kommunisten. Osteuropa-Archiv (1972), A91–A92.

optimistic beliefs figured importantly in the resolve of these reformist leaders to stay in power. Given the fundamental premises of their policy, the Soviet leadership could not risk pushing so far or so fast as to drive the key reformists to give up hope and resign.

Finally, having recognized the centrality of Soviet commitment to a *political solution* of their problems with Czechoslovakia, we can immediatley see practical constraints on Soviet policy which help explain some of the incongruities sketched out in the first part of this paper. These constraints have much to do with limitations on information, knowledge, and understanding. The map of Czechoslovak politics had been shaken up by the intervention and its consequences, and had to be recharted by Soviet policy makers. Among other things, several of the most reliable supporters of Soviet positions in the Czechoslovak leadership had been politically lamed through being labelled as "collaborators", and virtually all Czechoslovak leaders at all levels had condemned the intervention and acted in conjunction with the resistance to it. Soviet policy makers therefore had to scrutinize carefully the whole range of personnel at the higher levels of CPCz leadership in order to determine who could be relied upon and in order to have them insinuated into positions in which they could be of assistance.

Constraints on the Reformists: The Logic of Reform

Was it really inevitable that the Czechoslovak reformists would fail? Were the Soviets really determined to remove Dubček, Černík, Smrkovský and others who symbolized the reform movement from their positions of power and influence? Did they really want to place Czechoslovakia under the narrow group of leaders completely isolated from the population which has ruled the country since the completion of "normalization", and which has been so strikingly unsuccessful in broadening its base of support and legitimacy? Did the Soviets really intend for reform in Czechoslovakia to be rolled back as far as it eventually was, leaving the country so severely demoralized and with so many serious unresolved problems? What if the whole group of reformists had adopted a stance similar to that adopted by Gustáv Husák, who took over the leadership of the CPCz from Dubček in April 1969, and remained at the helm until 1988? Why could not all the reformists together have adopted a stance similar to Husák's, and together rescued more of the aims and aspirations of the "Prague Spring"? Why couldn't the reformists have sought first to win the confidence of the Soviet leadership, even if this had meant taking unpopular measures and alienating much of the population. Having done this, could they not have proven their reliability to the Soviets and gradually won greater latitude to carry out a significant part of their program, and eventually regain their popularity and the confidence and support of the people? Is this not, after all, essentially what János Kádár had done with such great success in the years after the Soviet invasion of Hungary?

During the first month or so after the signing of the Moscow Protocol, Zdeněk Mlynář attempted to strike out on a political course something like this. In fact, some observers at the time noted a similarity between the stances of Mlynář and Husák and

categorized them both as "realists"[34]. Unlike Husák however, Mlynář came quickly to recognize a fundamental incompatibility between the aim of winning Soviet confidence and the aim of preserving the essentials of the Party's reform program[35]. The failure of Husák's strategy places in relief the constraints perceived by Mlynář and the other reformists who rejected the strategic option of striving to satisfy the Soviets first, even at the expense of alienating the public. For, in the long run, although Husák remained in power for a long time, he was not successful either in approaching solutions to the pressing problems that gave rise to the 1968 reform movement in the first place, or in winning popular support for himself or the "normalized" regime which he led. As Dalimil wrote in 1973, paraphrasing what Ludvík Vaculík said in June 1967, "In five years the occupation of Czechoslovakia has not solved even a single one of the problems that had built up before January 1968". Or, as Mlynář put it in 1975: "On the surface it seems that everything is in accord with all that is officially asserted. However, under the surface our society is extraordinarily, gravely ill. This illness is chronic and for all of the past six years it cannot be talked about; its cause cannot even be named." The cause, continued Mlynář, is that in August 1968 the "natural efforts of Czechoslovak society to achieve a more rational organization of things ..." were forcibly suppressed[36].

But why was there such fundamental incompatibility between winning the confidence of the Soviets and preserving some modified variant of reform? Wasn't some middle-of-the-road solution feasible? And why has it not been possible to move beyond "normalization" back to the implementation of unnecessary reform – albeit more cautiously and at a slower pace than in 1968?

The Regime itself as the Principal Impediment to Reform: By the spring of 1968, there was broad consensus throughout Czechoslovakia that any truly effective reform would have to be preceded by fundamental changes in the political regime itself. It was widely recognized, as the Action Program states, that the "underlying causes" of a wide range of Czechoslovakia's problems were attributable to "deformations of the political system"[37]. As Pavel Kohout put it, almost a year after the intervention: "We didn't freely think up the Action Program. It reflected the true needs of the Party and of the whole society."[38] Writing in a similar vein several years later, Alexander Dubček referred to the "crisis in the Party and in society ... which resulted as the consequence of a long-term crisis beginning in the fifties and reaching a peak in the sixties"[39].

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[34] For example this was the consensus in discussions to which I was a party at Radio Free Europe's Headquarters in Munich during the month of September 1968.

[35] Mlynář 1978, 314–318.

[36] Mlynář, Zdeněk/Hájek, Jiří: Hovoří Z. Mlynář a J. Hájek. In: Listy (1975) Nr. 12, 13.

[37] Akční program komunistické strany Československa 1968, 8.

[38] Kohout, Pavel in: Die Zeit (July 1969).

[39] Dubček, Alexander: Dubček žaluje. In: Listy (1975) Nr. 4, 9.

This was not just idle talk. The five years prior to the replacement of Antonín Novotný as CPCz First Secretary in January 1968 and the eight months of the "Prague Spring" had taught the Czechs and Slovaks some profound lessons which could not be forgotten or rationalized away. During the last five years of the Novotný era, the top Party leadership, faced with severe political and economic crisis, had begun to experiment with reform. Even more significantly, throughout Czechoslovak society complaints, criticisms, and ideas for reform were increasingly widely discussed and articulated. However, the implementation of reforms was allowed only to the point that the entrenched power holders considered safe. Consequently, in area after area in which the need for reform was perceived, the Party leadership stood in the way with petty intervention and obstruction. As Karel Reyman wrote in the spring of 1968:

> Social scientists and other intellectuals had had no difficulty in diagnosing the root of the problem. That it rested primarily with a political system designed solely to transmit orders from above while allowing for no genuine participation on the lower levels, that the most uninspired segment of the vast bureaucracy assured continuation of the vicious circle, and that the only way out of the vicious circle was a basic change in the political system – all this had long been known and advocated by the reformers[40].

By the time of Novotný's replacement, the regime itself had come to be recognized as – indeed to symbolize – the principle obstacle to any real solutions to the country's various pressing problems. As Stanley Riveles shows, in his highly revealing study of the decline and fall of the Novotný regime, "the strands of opposition to various aspects of the leadership's policy came together in a coalition demanding fundamental reform in part because opposition to one set of specific policies implied opposition to another set"[41].

A major component of the political problem faced by the post-January reform leadership was that to win the support necessary to address the country's problems, it would have to *prove* its commitment to meaningful and consistent reform. It would have to prove that it had abandoned definitively the style and methods of rule which had brought discredit upon the old leadership. This is why the Czechoslovak reformists could not – before or after the 1968 intervention – do consistently what the Soviets required them to do. As Smrkovský put it (referring to discussions held with the Soviet leadership in May 1968), "they demanded a hard administrative, I should rather say police-like course of action against everyone in our country who stated his opinions, if they were not fully in harmony with the documents and policies of the

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[40] Reyman, Karel: The Winds of Change in Czechoslovakia. Radio Free Europe Research, Czechoslovakia 1968, 19. – Eidlin, Fred: January, August, and after: Czechoslovakia's Triumph and Tragedy. Radio Free Europe Research, Czechoslovakia 1969, 1–4.

[41] Riveles, Stanley: Party Organization and Political Leadership in Czechoslovakia, 1960–1968. Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York 1976, 49.

Party"[42]. Had the situation escaped the control of the Party, its post-January leadership seems to have been capable and willing to use such measures. But the objective situation in Czechoslovakia was very much under control throughout the pre-invasion period. Therefore, any resort to an "administrative-police-like course of action" would have been widely perceived as proof that the regime had not really changed its character and was not deserving of confidence and support.

The Problem of the Invasion, itself: Before the invasion, it was possible to be enthusiastically committed to reform and to be, at the same time, sympathetic to the Soviet Union and its concerns. This was indeed a combination of attitudes which the Czechoslovak leadership worked very hard to foster. Before the intervention it was possible to believe that, all threats and expressions of concern notwithstanding, the Soviets did have some understanding for the CPCz reform program (as the Soviets, themselves, had incessantly claimed), and would, in the final analysis, not resort to military intervention. The invasion made it much more difficult for people to believe that the Soviets were truly sincere in their expressions of sympathy with the fundamental principles of the CPCz reform program. This, in turn, made it far more difficult for the Czechoslovak leadership to maintain confidence among the population that reform would continue. And the need to maintain such confidence placed even greater constraints on the kinds of action the leadership could take, just at the time when it was being required to take actions that would be likely to undermine confidence even further.

Secondly, before the intervention, the remarkable unity of the peoples of Czechoslovakia could be seen as a positive phenomenon, even from the Soviet point of view. After all, never before had an East European Communist Party enjoyed such broad and enthusiastic support. The invasion reinforced the unity of the people and further strengthened popular support for the Communist Party and its leadership. However, it also gave this national unity an anti-Soviet character. This anti-Soviet national unity was, of course, intolerable from the Soviet point of view. It was a unity which would have to be broken, regardless of its value – indeed indispensability – for the building of a viable regime in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak reformists were thus placed in the impossible situation of winning Soviet confidence while, at the same time, seeking to maintain a Czechoslovak unity that, although necessary for their success, had unfortunately become anti-Soviet.

Conclusion

The dilemmas of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and 1969 have an interest and relevance that go far beyond that particular case history. The problems the Czechoslovak reformists attempted to resolve in 1968 and 1969 are problems shared by all the regimes in the Soviet bloc. And the fears which events in Czechoslovakia evoked in 1968 and

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[42] Smrkovský 1975, 8.

1969 among the power holders of these states are indicative of what stands in the way of viable solutions to these problems. As J. F. Brown writes:

> Both the logic and the dynamics of the East-European situation constantly demand that certain basic problems be solved – the Prague Spring was a serious and humane attempt to do just that – and the more the Soviets try, through repression, diversion, or evasion, to dodge these problems, the more acute they will become, and the more relevant the Prague Spring will be ... It never really lost its relevance for Eastern Europe and this is now being recognized more than ever before[43].

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[43] Brown, James F.: Eastern Europe since the Invasion of Czechoslovakia. Radio Free Europe Research. RAD Background Report (1978).